

Frequently Asked Questions

What is stormwater?

Stormwater, also referred to as runoff, surface water, or wet weather flow, is rain or snow that falls on streets, parking areas, rooftops and other hard surfaces. It then either flows directly into nearby streams or travels there through drainage systems, such as curbs and gutters, inlets, ditches, pipes, storm sewers, and detention ponds. The flows are then discharged directly into drainage ways such as Mill Creek, Browns Creek, Richland Creek, the Cumberland River and tributaries to these waterways. As the stormwater runs across the surfaces, it picks up pollutants or contaminants such as litter, debris, oils and antifreeze from cars, soil, pet waste, fertilizers, etc. As it picks up these contaminants, it becomes polluted runoff – the largest source of pollution in our streams, creeks and rivers. Unlike our wastewater collection and treatment system, stormwater receives no treatment before it is released into the environment.

How is stormwater managed in Nashville?

Under significant rainfall conditions, stormwater is the cause of flooding, water pollution, and erosion. For the safety of the public and for the protection of public and private property, stormwater must be properly managed. Stormwater management, provided by the Stormwater Division of Metro Water Services, is one of the most important responsibilities of Metro government.

The Stormwater Division works diligently to:

- **control flooding** by installing, cleaning, and maintaining stormwater infrastructure such as curbs and gutters, street inlets, pipes, ditches, culverts, detention ponds etc.;
- **regulate development** by setting design standards, providing technical guidance, reviewing plans for development and redevelopment, inspecting construction sites, and enforcing regulations; and
- **prevent pollution** by educating the public, implementing clean water programs, inspecting and monitoring runoff, complying with federal and state regulations, and enforcing water quality standards set by the Clean Water Act.

What is a stormwater user fee?

A stormwater user fee is a financial charge for stormwater services. Like water or wastewater user fees, stormwater fees are based on the property's use of, or demand on, the public drainage system and stormwater management services. A stormwater user fee establishes a direct link between the demand for stormwater services (based on the size of your house and driveway or your business and parking area) and the cost of providing those services. Throughout the nation and in Tennessee, stormwater user fees have been shown to be a fair means of covering the cost of providing those services by those who directly benefit from the program.

Why are we charged a stormwater user fee in Nashville?

There is a very great need for stormwater infrastructure improvement in Metro Nashville. In recent years, the stormwater program was funded through surplus revenue accrued from collected water and sewer fees. As the cost of providing those services has risen, without a water and sewer rate increase for 14 years, there have not been surplus funds generated during recent years. Without funds, we have had to defer some maintenance and postpone construction of most of our corrective projects

The stormwater program needs a dedicated funding source. A user fee is a fair and stable means of funding stormwater services and would provide a dedicated and adequate source of revenue that would allow the stormwater program to be self-sustaining like the water and sewer programs.

Who has to pay user fees?

Most of the property owners in the Metro Nashville and Davidson County service area will participate in the Stormwater User Fee. Since stormwater runs off every property in Davidson County, it contributes to the polluted runoff problems in the area, and magnifies the need to properly operate and maintain the storm sewer system. Hard surfaces, such as driveways, parking areas and rooftops create runoff and contribute to the amount of water that must be managed. It is most fair to have all developed properties pay a fee that is proportional to the amount of stormwater runoff from that property. **Some properties are located in areas that pay for stormwater services already and/or that do not receive stormwater services for MWS Stormwater Division (e.g., satellite cities). Those residents and businesses would not pay a Metro Nashville stormwater user fee.**

Who is exempt?

The following properties are exempt from payment of the stormwater user fee:

- Residential Properties zoned AG and AR2a of which half or more is used annually for the raising for sale of livestock or crops.
- Properties from which no stormwater is discharged into or through the Public System.
- Properties having no Impervious Area.
- Properties wholly within the corporate boundaries of Belle Meade, Berry Hill, Forest Hills, Goodlettsville, Lakewood and Oak Hill. Provided, however, that each such city may, upon approval of its legislative body, enter into the contract such that all property within its boundaries will participate in the Metropolitan Government's stormwater utility and system of stormwater user fees in the same manner as the remainder of the area within the General Services District.

What about tax-exempt properties?

Since all developed properties contribute to the problems and costs associated with stormwater management, so all properties will be assessed a fee. Some non-profit organizations and public educational institutions might pay a lower rate if they meet the requirements for a credit as defined in the Credit Manual.

Isn't this essentially a tax on rain water?

The Storm Water fee is a user fee — because it charges property owners for a service. That service is managing the stormwater runoff coming from their property.

How much would I have to pay (Single Family Residential)?

Residential properties will be charged between \$1.50 and \$4.50 per month (for a single family residence) based on the amount of impervious area on your property. This four-tier residential billing structure is dependent upon the amount of impervious area, or areas covered with hard surfaces that do not allow rain or snow to infiltrate into the soil as it would on natural surfaces, like grass or dirt. Your property may include impervious surfaces such as rooftops, driveways, patio areas, sidewalks, parking lots and other man-made structures.

Residential Rates

0-400 sq. ft.	\$ 0.00
400-2,000 sq. ft.	\$ 1.50
2,000-6,000 sq. ft.	\$ 3.00
> 6,000 sq. ft.	\$ 4.50

What types of property are considered single-family residential?

The four-tier residential billing structure applies to homes that are zoned, designed and built as a residence for one family, and are completely detached from other residential or commercial structures.

Commercial Storm Water rates apply to:

- duplexes, triplexes, apartments, or other multi-family homes
- any structure for which a business license is on file for that address
- businesses or commercial enterprises.

How will the stormwater fee be billed?

The stormwater fee will be separate line item on your monthly water and sewer bill. If you do not receive a monthly water and/or sewer bill, you will be billed quarterly for stormwater alone.

What happens if I do not pay the Stormwater User Fee?

Customers who don't pay their Stormwater User Fee risk having their water service turned off. If you do not have MWS water or sewer service (such as customers with wells or private septic systems) and choose not to pay your storm water fee, your unpaid stormwater account will be turned over to a collection agency.

What if I disagree with the impervious area measurement used to determine my stormwater fee or feel I qualify for an exemption?

If you feel your Stormwater User fee has been calculated incorrectly or that you qualify for an exemption, please complete the online form at

www.nashville.gov/water/cwip/forms/stormwater_fee_review_form. The request will be reviewed by MWS stormwater staff and you will be contacted regarding appropriate actions.

Do other communities have stormwater user fees?

There are over 800 communities, towns and cities with user fees in place in the U.S. today, some of which have been in existence for more than 20 years. Stormwater user fees are also being used by at least 10 other communities in Tennessee.

How will the fee be calculated?

The fee will be based on the amount of impervious area on your property. The four-tier residential billing structure is dependent upon the amount of Impervious area, or areas covered with hard surfaces that do not allow rain or snow to infiltrate into the soil as it would on natural surfaces, like grass or dirt. It includes surfaces such as rooftops, driveways, patio areas, sidewalks, parking lots and other man-made structures. For the most part, impervious area coverage is determined through evaluation of aerial photography or satellite imagery.

What is impervious surface?

Impervious surfaces are those disturbed or hardened surface areas that either prevent or limit the natural entry of water into the soil. Roof tops, buildings, streets, parking lots, sidewalks,

asphalt, concrete, other paving, driveways, compacted gravel, patios, and artificial turf are all examples of impervious surfaces. This type of hard-surface improvement reduces natural infiltration and increases the amount of stormwater that flows off your property and into the drainage systems, creeks and rivers of our city.

How do you determine how much impervious surface each parcel has?

Aerial photos are taken during the winter and early spring when leaves have fallen off the trees. The aerial photo shows the impervious surfaces on each parcel. Computer software is used to draw around the edges of the hard surfaces shown on the photo to estimate square footage of residential parcels.

Why is impervious area being used to calculate the fee?

Impervious areas (hard surfaces) increase the amount of water entering the stormwater system and our streams and rivers. This increases the chance of flooding, stream bank erosion, and channel deposition (or sedimentation). As residential lots and commercial facilities have larger amounts of impervious area, it increases the appropriate size for infrastructure; and the rate at which infrastructure needs repair and replacement. Larger lots, homes, and driveways simply have greater needs for stormwater control.

Runoff from impervious surfaces also carries pollutants such as sediment, sand, salt, fuel from spills and leaks of vehicles, herbicides and pesticides, detergents, metals, floatable debris, and bacteria from pet waste. Stormwater runoff is not treated at a treatment plant before it reaches our streams, rivers, and lakes.

Because the amount of impervious area is directly related to the demand on the stormwater system and the stormwater program, relating the amount a user pays to the amount of impervious area on their property is a fair and equitable way to fund Metro's stormwater program.

Will there be credits?

Credits, or reductions in fees, will be available to **non-residential properties** that reduce Metro's stormwater management costs or lessen the impact to the stormwater system. Non-residential properties receive credit for mitigating stormwater runoff impacts through education, or source controls for water quantity or quality. Ordinance BL2009-407 establishes the maximum credit at 50% of the stormwater user fee. The available credits are:

- • Detention Credit up to 20%
- • Quality Credit up to 20%
- • Education Credit up to 20%

See the Stormwater User Fee Credit Manual for complete instructions on Credits.

Who will pay the fees for public buildings?

Properties including public buildings owned by Metro Government and by the State of Tennessee will be required to pay the fees as well. These costs would be incorporated into their operating expenses.

Why is the stormwater management program not funded by tax revenues?

The Stormwater User Fee was selected as a more equitable way to distribute the program cost because:

- The fee is based on each property's actual demand for stormwater services as measured by how much impervious surface is on the property (that is, buildings, parking lots, garages and similar surfaces).
- All property, including government, schools and tax exempt properties, will participate in the overall cost of the stormwater management program.

My neighborhood has drainage problems that are affecting my property. Who do I call to get some action on these problems?

Service requests, reports of illegal dumping into the storm drainage system and other questions about Stormwater Utility Services may be directed to our Customer Services Center at (615) 862-4600. Metro Water Services staff will collect the necessary information and investigate the problem. If it is determined that the problem is within MWS's area of responsibility, we will advise you of the action to be taken. If it is determined that the problem is outside MWS's area of responsibility (such as drainage problems on private property), you will be notified of such.

Why do I have to pay when I do not have any drainage problems?

Everyone in the City benefits from the Stormwater Management Program. Because stormwater runs off all property, the City must have a program and funding to manage the increase in runoff and pollutants. The benefits to all Metro residents include complying with Federal and State mandates, protecting your property from upstream runoff, protecting property downstream from your runoff, providing safe roadways, educating our children about pollution and improving water quality.

Why is a user fee the best solution?

A stormwater user fee is the fairest way to fund the operation and maintenance of Metro Nashville's stormwater system, meet the requirements of the federal water quality permit, and add and maintain facilities to address existing and future flooding, erosion and sedimentation issues. A dedicated stormwater user fee establishes a direct link between the demand for services and the cost of providing those services. Like water or wastewater user fees, stormwater fees are based on the property's use of, or demand on, the public drainage system.

How will a dedicated stormwater user fee benefit me?

The user fee will fund most or all of the stormwater services in the Metro area. Residents will see an enhanced level of service, a better-maintained storm sewer system, less flooding, less erosion, and cleaner water in our streams. MWS Stormwater Division staff will once again be able to relieve the backlog of citizen requests and provide quicker and more reliable response to citizen concerns. Previously, funding has allowed for resolution of only the most severe and threatening stormwater problems. With a dedicated user fee, even the less severe, nuisance-type problems would be resolved. And master planning could be conducted to prepare for and head off potential stormwater problems related to new development.

How will revenues be used?

All revenues will be used to support the stormwater program, which includes compliance with the Federal National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) regulations for water quality. Program priorities include maintenance of the drainage system, such as pipes and ditches; protecting properties from flooding; protecting our streams and wetlands from erosion and pollution; and major capital investments for the drainage system.

Is this required by federal regulations?

A user fee is not required by the federal government. However, the following stormwater management actions are required of Metro Government by federal regulation:

- Flood control and management
- Drainage and street maintenance
- Municipal facility runoff control program
- Erosion prevention and sediment control
- Water quality treatment
- Illicit discharge detection and elimination
- Public education and information
- Proper application of pesticides/herbicides/fertilizers